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Contemporary Curriculum Design for Higher Education: An Islamic Appraisal

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Abstract

Education is a key to developing positivity in human beings. It helps to become a good citizen. In Islam, education has a central role that every Muslim must seek. Islamic education is centered on the teaching of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). The Quran is revealed in Arabic, therefore sources of the teachings of Islam are in Arabic. It is the religious duty of the Muslim Ummah to learn Arabic and have command in it. The Quran is the only Book that provides complete guidance to humanity, whether the matters related to social life, economic matters, political issues, or religious life. Keeping this in view, the curriculum should also be prepared in the light of the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Focusing on the contemporary curriculum design for Islamic studies for higher education, this paper describes the missing material in the existing curriculum and suggests that the use of modern resources, arranging conferences, and an expansive transformative framework for Islamic studies are the key tools for its implementation. It stresses the curricular designers to approach the existing curriculum more comprehensively which covers Islamic Law, comparative studies,

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contemporary trends in world traditions, peace dialogue, and practical involvement of students too. This goal can be gained through amendments or revising the existing curriculum. The outcome of it will results in students' critical thinking, positivity, comprehensive knowledge, language proficiency, and character building.

Keys Words: *Curriculum Design, Program Evaluation for Islamic Studies, Islamic Studies.*

Preliminary

Education is a journey of exploring new ideas and moving towards unknown things. It is a key to making good citizens. A society could not progress if it ignores education. It builds the future generation. The hidden skills could be polished by educating oneself. Therefore, it can be argued that education plays a crucial role in continuing the succession of success. It smooths the way towards gaining future goals. Without education, the nation cannot progress. Peace among societies could only be possible through educating their citizens.

In the Quran, Allah says, "Nor should the Believers all go forth together: if a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them, that thus they (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil)"[1] which means the knowledge of religion. Islamic education spreads the religion of Islam as a religion of all human beings. It establishes the relation of Allah with humanity. Brotherhood, tolerance, morality, respect, justice, openness, diversity rights, freedom, goodness, love, care, sharing, truth, unity, and the values of humanity are the basic teachings of Islam. Islamic education is completely different from western education. Westerns are materialistic, far from spiritual values. While Islam takes both

materiality and spirituality. Allah is the creator of the universe; it is the sign of Allah's creation. So, the source of Islamic education is both the Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH).

It is a reality that education gives satisfaction and keeps human beings far from destruction. So, the aim of the paper is to polish the hidden skills of student. This calls to make certain changes because ultimately it is the education system that brainwashes people's minds and sets the goals which prepare the next generation and tell the priorities and the goals of life. What should be struggled for and what wants to be established. Therefore, the education system is primarily important, making the nation strong, a nation rooted in the traditional path. In this way, there is nothing harmful in modifying the educational system according to the need of time. Since the academic disciples systematized the way, the system was. Now it is necessary to revise the curriculum designs.

The curriculum must be designed in such a way that teaches students the diversity of knowledge. It must enhance the critical thinking in students and motivate the students to involve in various extra curriculum activities. Thus, the contemporary approach to the Islamic studies curriculum must grasp creativity and critical thinking.

2: A Brief Background to the History of Islamic Curriculum

The progress of society depends on education which is an essential feature in developing positivity among societies. Education is considered as a transmission of values of humanity. It is a way to mold the individuals' characters. In this way, education transforms the traditional knowledge towards its youth. The purpose of human creation can be fulfilled through education. The numerous verses of the Quran show the importance of knowledge. In Sura Al-Alaq 9 [2] Allah says, "Read, O Prophet, in the Name of your Lord Who created"[3] Another place Allah says, "O you who have believed, when you are told, "Space yourselves" in assemblies, then make space; Allah will make space for you. And

when you are told, "Arise," then arise; Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees. And Allah is Aware of what you do"[4] These verses of the Quran stress education.

The spirit of the Quran is to awaken human beings to think about the reality of the universe and a phenomenon for reaching the ultimate reality. So, the Quran invites human beings to conquer the universe, and think about the signs of Allah. It will open the hidden signs and pave the way forward to new opportunities for learning.

Muslims consider gaining an education as a form of *Ibadah*, the Islamic form of worship. Through centuries the development of the Islamic religious curriculum illustrates the importance of Islamic teachings. The history of the Islamic period shows that it has gone through four different periods. The first period of the Islamic religious curriculum is the period of revelation. The characteristic of this period is that it was purely Arabic, and fortitude the basic teachings of Islam. The aim was to spread the true teachings of Islam. In the second period, Islamic education got flourished, and it spread to other parts of the world. Apart from traditional teachings, it includes non-religious sciences too. In the second last period, Arabic a traditional language of Muslim Ummah declined and spread the way of repetition and summarization[5] The last period of the Islamic religious curriculum is considered the period of the revival of education in the Islamic world[6] This period can be characterized as the modern period, which stresses calls for human rights, gender, human freedom, equality, a nation-state, and a modern political system, with democracy, banking system, and constitution of the country made by the parliaments. These kinds of changes were from the aditional outlook to the modern outlook.

The history illustrates how Islam responded to modernity through revival and reforms and all that. And worked double edge sword wants to promote the view in which Islam is seen as compatible with modernity. Never want to discard religion not they wanted to compromise on the modern requirement. The aim was for Islam to be a flexible religion

in the world that worked in the atmosphere of new stances so what happened, was that they revised the things to develop the principle which is workable in today's life[7] It shows that the superiority of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PUBH) were maintained in history.

In this brief background of the development of the Islamic religious curriculum, it is made clear according to the needs of time that educational curricula could be revised, updated, and responded to changes occurring in the world. It provides a chance to construct knowledge systemically and helps the learners in getting their educational goals. Its shows that education is a vehicle for the construction of the character building of students. It transforms the social values from generation to generation. These educational goals are possible through the help of a curriculum that conveys the objectives of education to students. Therefore, the curriculum must design in such a way that provides for the contemporary needs of students. Because it is a plan of knowing, seeking, and learning about surrounding things.

There is another important theme in the Islamic curriculum that enlightens the student's mind regarding Islamic values, and its heritage. Through this, it clarifies the hidden confusing questions of students. In sum, the aim of Islamic curriculum design according to contemporary needs is to make awareness among students of the true values of Islam, its teachings, and beliefs. This aim can be achieved through designing the curriculum under the basic sacred sources of Islam which are the Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH).

3: The Challenges in Curriculum Designing for Higher Education; Setting the Evaluation in Curriculum for Islamic Studies

The lack of practices, less knowledge of theoretical insights, inadequate curriculum designs, and the unawareness of students with Islamic history, culture, teachings, and

Islamic heritage are the existing issues in Islamic studies curriculum designs. The growing institution of higher education needs a curriculum that enhances the critical thinking, knowledge of Islamic heritage of Muslim scholars, comprehensive comparative study of various religions, openness towards others, and polish the skills of the students[8] In order to get these goals of the curriculum, the designers must have a command of Islamic heritage, its values, principles, and Islamic philosophy. This implementation would be fruitful if it is according to the values of Islam Shariah. Which essentially are the Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH).

The West's example is in front of us, how the human-made sources could provide the values of true spirit. West not only rejects the values of humanity but unqualifies men from the status of humanity. The original sin, grill, materialism, evolution, socialism, communism, and realism, humanism is the characteristic of western knowledge[9] They have a piece of good materialistic knowledge but are far from the values of spirituality. Western knowledge solely focuses on this world, while rejecting the world hereafter. This shows the spirit of Islam is a more comprehensive source than those offered by western humanistic sources. Therefore, according to contemporary needs, the curriculum designs for higher education must be planned by following the true values of Islam. Which guides every step of human life, and develops the positivity, respect, values of humanity, morality, peace among diversity, and attitude learning. Above all, the curriculum must have advanced knowledge, skills, methodology, various approaches, and scientific equipment. These sources are fruitful in learning the knowledge.

The planning of curriculum for Islamic studies for higher education calls toward living, dynamic sources of guideline which is relevant to all ages[10] It can connect the present to the past by following traditional educational thought.

The curriculum should be designed in such a way that must include the comprehensive study of religions which in detail provides knowledge, practices, worships,

rituals, and festivals of other traditions. This inclusion of knowledge provides a comprehensive understanding of other traditions. On the one hand, it provides positivity, openness, and peaceful relations with others, and on the other hand, it develops warm human relationships, and awareness of each other. It revives the practices of early Islam. As Islam is a religion of peace which in itself stands for peace, submission, and salvation[11] Islam acknowledges diversity[12] The numerous verses of the Quran reveal the acknowledgment of the diversity of religious tradition[13] Hence, reconciling Islamic religious studies with amending existing sources is also needed. The first step should be taught side by side from both the Islamic and western perspectives. That is a sort of comparative analysis that will provide more comprehensive knowledge about world religions. It will open the hidden window of mind towards wide-ranging knowledge of world traditions. Brings creative, comprehensive understanding, and positivity towards others.

Globalization brought men closer to each other, and eastern thought and ideology became well-known to the west[14] Modernity introduced various equipment, ideologies, and thoughts. As a result, different ideas got increased exponentially. At this level, the explosive increase of inter-religious dialogue is shifted in the epistemological paradigm[15] Hewar is used in Quran and nations were not aware of it. Christians were engaged in suppressing other religions and had a minimum interest in it. Jews too react the same. The same is the case with Hinduism as it is becoming a non-preaching religion. The background knowledge is crucial for a student that how now the west is moving towards dialogue. Therefore, it is required for curriculum designers that separate subjects in dialogue must be included. Personal engagement with positivity and openness towards various faith followers is still missing in students. The progressive stage of learning is required.

The curriculum must be designed in such a way that develops critical thinking in students. Just relying on textual legacy and memorizing it is not enough, the course of Islamic studies must develop critical thinking in students. To come up with different

approaches, ideas, and thinking to the same subject. To address these missing things curriculum designer must be updated. This advance and updated curriculum according to time do not mean that follows the western perspective as it is rather dealt with critically. The things which do not contradicts the sacred sources of Islam must be followed. The expansive framework of ethics and flexibility should be the preference. In short, the designer of the curriculum must focus on the practical side of learning. For instance, it must include worships, seminars, conferences, and academic discussions. Engaging and attending such sessions will enhance the board's understanding. Openness is the principle that is self-motivated to keep openness towards diversity. Understand the rights of pluralism.

The early Muslim scholars are pioneers in the field of study of other religions. Through descriptive study, they analyze the other religious traditions. In this study, they did not pass any judgment just describes the other religion[16] Unfortunately, the students are unaware of this fact, even though they do not have any knowledge about the pioneer scholars of Muslims in this field. So, the designer of the curriculum must include these facts in the syllabus, so the generation has some knowledge about the heritage of Muslim scholars. Higher education is sufficient for exploring the Muslim heritage. Which provides a complete knowledge of earlier Muslim scholars. Due to unawareness of the methodologies of earlier Muslim scholars, several students consider that prominent fields of studies were initiated by western scholars. This lack of knowledge is harmful to both students and Muslim societies. Through, the curriculum these missing things must be recovered.

However, the curriculums for Islamic studies must be balanced in philosophy, history, science, and arts. It should all-encompassing the spirit of Islam. The books of prominent scholars in this field of philosophy and science must be included in the syllabus. In each syllabus of the subject, the related books must be recommended. So, students have confidence in their heritage. This sort of struggle revives the early spirit of Muslim scholars in youth. The addition of content and trends enhance the knowledge of contemporary trends

in different world traditions. It will enhance the contemporary knowledge of the world, which is a sort of comprehensiveness. The changing pattern of the syllabus will provide an opportunity for nurturing values, and respect for diversity. It will be interesting for students to have contemporary knowledge of world traditions.

The modification of the teaching method is another need for time. The existing teaching method is just focused on the literature corpus not nourishing the hidden abilities of students. So, students learn it just to pass the exams, even the concern of teachers is just preparing the students for their exams. This method is a sort of memorization while deprivation from thinking. That is why students are unable to face modern challenges[17] This stagnant method should be revised by introducing creative, and innovative methods. In this way, it will enhance critical thinking, bits of bits of intelligence, and integrate ways of learning. Moreover, the issues regarding it should be best mapped.

At the same time nurture critical thinking so students can judge circumstances according to Islamic law. New approaches toward education should be included. Teachers are role models for students so they must maintain their honorable status. Teachers should be cooperative, creative, sincere in their profession, morally good, and share their educational experiences with students so that students can be inspired by them. There should be a good relationship between teachers and students so that students can easily share their thinking[18] Lack of communication between students and teachers results in an inability of students to gain and learn their educational goals. It is a way of shifting the traditional role of teachers towards a creative role.

The curriculums for Islamic studies for higher education must provide an equal learning opportunity. The curricular designs make sure the equalities of leaning, the division of groups, status, and any other sort of superiority should not be encouraged. Physically unable students must be treated on equality basis. It must formulate to gain the basic skills. The syllabus should be designed in such a way that enhances the morality, respect, values

of humanity, justice, forgiveness, and peacemaking among students. It nourishes the moral values of students.

Systematic research should be included. Policy development should be assured in order to respond to contemporary challenges. Train students in such a way, that they confidently present their point of view. Presenting Conference papers, involvement in workshops, and encouragement in arranging seminars should be included as a part of the subject requirements.

In the age of modern resources, the world has been moving according to modern skills. Modern resources include slides films, recordings, learning charts and multimedia, PowerPoint presentations, software, zoom meeting, google class, and so on. Multimedia is the easiest way for conveying knowledge. But the lack of Instructional material such as multimedia access is a serious issue. Even few teachers possess problems with the usage of this material. In order to have a knowledge and command of it, training seminars, and workshops regarding it must be arranged. Teachers should be made responsible for such training. Accessibility should be assured.

The growing trend of the use of new disciplinary approaches should be included in the curriculum. Due to the influences of modernity, the curriculum for Islamic studies for higher education must be giving priority to the values of Islam. Islamic and western perspectives should be made clear. Students should be able to do a distinction between Islamic heritage and western modernity. The curriculum must enhance the deep knowledge of Islam, Islamic tradition, and its law. And make students capable of distinction between Islam law and western ideologies. It should create an appropriate model of learning which fulfills the aims of Islamic education.

4: An Analysis of the Expressed Curriculum Designing for Islamic Studies

The above-mentioned challenges and evaluation of contemporary curriculum design for Islamic studies for higher education stress on amendment of the existing curriculum according to the contents of Islamic studies. These stances enhance the quality of necessary equipment. It sheds light on its practical implementation too. So, the curriculum of Islamic studies meets the qualities of creativeness, and innovativeness, and is capable of constructing the ability of students. A curriculum is a sort of planning, which plans the future of students.

Apart from the curricular designer, the teacher's role is very important. They are the role model and the character builder of students. The teacher's educational degrees and experiences make a great impact on students. Students get inspiration from them. But sadly, at some educational level, they were unable to do fairness with the profession. There is a need to set a criterion while hiring teachers. Professionals must be the preference.

Language is another barrier to understanding things. Most students are unable to grasp the spirit of the text. The sources of the Islamic studies are in Arabic, while most students are unable to read and write it. The Quran is revealed in Arabic. The primary sources of Muslim heritage are in Arabic too. If the students are weak in Arabic how they can hold on to Islamic studies, Salat, Fiqh, Islamic law, and Hadith? So, students face a huge problem at this level. If the students are weak in basics, then they can not progress any further. It is a serious issue, and the designer of the curriculum at primary to higher levels must take it seriously. The best solution is that at the primary level Arabic should be made compulsory. So, when students reach a higher level, they without any barrier gain further knowledge.

In short, at an initial level, a curricular designer must pay attention to the sources of the text. Because it is basic in the curriculum of Islamic studies on which further progress could proceed. If the basic is weak, or unclear, the building of knowledge is useless. Because

one has not any commands on originality. Therefore, curriculum designers must take this issue of language seriously. Like, a Planner should plan it in a way that at a higher-level text would be more adequate. Apart, students must be involved in seminars, workshops, and academic discussions. They should have the ability to arrange the conferences. Promote peace building, Islamic values, and Islamic laws. Producing a fruitful model of Islamic studies for generation is the primary objective of Islamic education. By doing that, it will not only produce peacemakers, but it also leads to achieving the happiness of this world and hereafter too.

Conclusion

This article aims to highlight the importance of education in light of the Quran and hadith. By briefly describing the Islamic curriculum in different periods in the history of Islam this article highlights that the Islamic curriculum should be changed and revised according to time and circumstances following the Quran and Sunnah. If we throw light on the current curriculum, it reveals that there is a lack of practical knowledge, theoretical insight, and comprehensiveness. The current curriculum is such that does not develop critical thinking in students. So, the curriculum should be organized in such a way that the effort to highlight the Islamic heritage among the students is ongoing.

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